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Awareness of False Information: Urban Legends

Master's Project

Submitted to the Faculty
Of the Master of Science Program in Secondary Education
Of Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

National Technical Institute for the Deaf
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

By

Erin Fernsler

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Science

Rochester, New York

May 22, 2003

Approved: _____
(Project Advisor)

(Program Director)

I dedicate this project to my inspirations-

Feta Fernsler, for his patience and ideas,

and

Mallory Johns, for her creativeness and zest for stories.

I love you.

ABSTRACT

It is typical for people to believe urban legends. An urban legend is any modern, fictional story, told as truth that reaches a wide audience by being passed from person to person. The study of urban legends helps us be more alert to false information in our everyday lives. There are very limited resources about urban legends and the impact of the stories on deaf culture. There are very few stories that are common in the deaf community. There are plenty of books about urban legends, but none includes deaf people. This is a problem for the deaf students because they may not have enough exposure to urban legends and may not be able to detect which are true or false. This research project will provide a basis for those who want to develop a curriculum or workshops about awareness of false information for D/deaf students.

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem:

It is human nature to believe a "true story". We all have a degree of gullibility in us, which affects our beliefs and paranoia when we hear a story. Legend study is a most revealing area of such research because the stories that people believe to be true hold an important place in their worldview. "If it's true, then it's important" is an axiom to be trusted, therefore, it is doubly important to determine whether or not the lore really is true or not. Simply becoming aware of this modern folklore which we all have to some degree is a revelation in itself, but going beyond this to compare the tales, isolate their consistent themes, and relate them to the rest of the culture can yield rich insights into the state of our current civilization (Brunvand, 2001). Since there is no basis of research for deaf students on their awareness of false information, this research project is a beginning. My main question is: are deaf students more likely to take urban legends seriously compared to hearing peers? If so, what are the possible causes?

Importance of the Problem:

It is important to increase our knowledge of myths, rumors and legends. The most remarkable thing about urban legends is that so many people believe them and pass them on. What is it about these stories that make people want to spread the word? Often, the legends are told orally so do deaf people have access to these oral traditions? With today's information technology, it is possible to accelerate the spread of legends. More deaf people have access to these legends, thanks to computers, but are they aware the emails or stories are just hoaxes?

This research project provides a basis for teachers to develop a curriculum about awareness of false information, using urban legends as part of a unit plan. With the data provided, the teachers might be able to choose new topics that would motivate students to learn and read about.

Order of Presentation:

This paper will be presented with a literature review explaining what urban legends are with examples, why it is human nature to believe such stories, the differences between folktales, rumors and legends, examples of folktales in Deaf culture, the popularity of urban legends, and awareness of false information. In the method section, I will explain my plan for research, including questions, participants, and procedure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What Are Urban Legends?

Urban legends are claimed to be true stories that are "too good to be true". These popular fables describe presumable real (though odd) events that happened to a friend of a friend. They are told by credible persons narrating them in a believable style because they do believe them. The setting/actions are realistic and familiar to ordinary people. Urban legends are too neatly

plotted to be believed. The defining qualities are oral repetition and variation of stories from person to person; the minor details are constantly changed. There is a consistent narrative core. (Brunvand, 1999).

I must explain at this point that what I mean by urban legends are all those bizarre, whimsical, 99 percent apocryphal, yet believable, stories that are too good to be true (Brunvand, 1981). They are too odd, too coincidental, and too neatly plotted to be accepted as literal truth in every place where they are told. Such stories deal with familiar everyday matters like travel, shopping, pets, babysitting, crime, accidents, sex, business, government, and so forth (Mikkelsen, 1995). Although the stories are phrased as if factual and are often attached to a particular locality, urban legends are actually migratory, and like all folklore, they exist in variant versions. Typically, urban legends are attributed to a friend of a friend, and often their narrative structure sets up some kind of puzzling situation that is resolved by a sudden plot twist, at which point the story ends abruptly (Wells, 1999). I emphasize story throughout this informal definition; I am not including plotless rumors, gossip, bits of misinformation, etc., which share some of these features, as being technically the same as urban legends (Brunvand, 2001). Here is an example of an urban legend:

I wish to warn you about a new crime ring that is targeting business travelers. My sister-in-law works with a lady that this happened to her son's neighbor who lives in Houston. This ring is well organized, well funded, has very skilled personnel, and is currently in most major cities and recently very active in New Orleans [or Las Vegas or Houston]. The crime begins when a business traveler goes to a lounge for a drink at the end of the workday. A person in the bar walks up as they sit alone and offers to buy them a drink. The last thing the traveler remembers until they wake up in a hotel room bathtub, their body submerged to their neck in ice, is sipping that drink. There is a note taped to the wall instructing them not to move and to call 911. A phone is on a small table next to the bathtub for them to call. The business traveler calls 911 who have become quite familiar with this crime. The business traveler is instructed by the 911 operator to

very slowly and carefully reach behind them and feel if there is a tube persuading from their lower back.

The business traveler finds the tube and answers, "Yes." The 911 operator tells them to remain still, having already sent paramedics to help. The operator knows that both of the business traveler's kidneys have been harvested (Harris, 2001, 2).

Urban legends are folklore, not history. To some degree, again like much other folklore, urban legends must be considered false, at least in the sense that the same rather bizarre events could not actually have happened in so many localities to so many aunts, cousins, neighbors, in-laws, and classmates of the hundreds and thousands of individual tellers of the tales. Still, like traditional folklore, the stories do tell one kind of truth. They are a unique, unselfconscious reflection of major concerns of individuals in the societies in which the legends circulate (Brunvand, 1981).

In the world of modern urban legends there is usually no geographical or generation gap between teller and event. Both the teller and receiver believe that the story is true; it really occurred, and recently, and always to someone else who is quite close to the narrator, or at least a friend of a friend. Urban legends are told both in the course of casual conversations and in such special situations as campfires, slumber parties, and college dormitory bull sessions. The legends' physical settings are often close by, real, and sometimes even locally renowned for other such happenings. Though the characters in the stories are usually nameless, they are true to life examples of the kind of people the narrators and their audience knows firsthand (Brunvand, 1981).

By definition, legends are stories and, as such, feature a cast of characters, plotline, and denouement (Schank, 1990). Because they lack these elements, other forms of contemporary lore (eg. e-mailed warnings, odd facts, folk beliefs) cannot properly be termed urban legends even though they do fall into the general subset of folklore. A common mistake is the equation of

'urban legend' with 'false' (i.e., "Oh, that's an urban legend!"). Though the vast majority of such tales are pure invention, tiny handfuls do turn out to be based on real incidents (Brunvand, 1968). What moves true tales of this type out of the world of news and into the genre of contemporary lore is the blurring of details and multiplicity of claims that it happened locally, alterations, which takes place as the story is passed through countless hands. Though there might indeed have been an original actual event, it clearly did not happen to as many people or in as many places as the various recountings of it would have one believe (Brunvand, 1984).

Why Do People Believe Such Stories?

In the story of the organ harvesters, you can see how some of the elements (humor, horror, warning, embarrassment, morality, or appeal to empathy) come together. The most outstanding feature of the story is its sense of horror: The image of a man waking up lying in a bathtub full of ice, with one less kidney, is a lurid one indeed. But the real hook is the cautionary element. Most people travel to unfamiliar cities from time to time, and Las Vegas is one of the most popular tourist spots in the world. The story also includes a moral lesson, in that the businessman ended up in the unpleasant predicament only after going to drink at a bar and then flirting with a mysterious woman (Harris, 1998). Urban legends are best described as cautionary or moralistic tales passed along by someone who believes the story to have happened to someone he knows or to an acquaintance of a friend or family member (Harris, 1998). Indeed, that is why we believe the stories we do -- because these tidbits are passed along to us by people we trust implicitly, it never occurs to us to doubt them. Despite our being heartily mistrustful of anything found in the newspaper, the vast majority of us tend to unquestioningly believe urban legends. Why? Because invariably it's either a dear friend or someone we look up to doing the telling. Furthermore, that person *swears* a friend of hers knows the actual person it happened to. As

such, this isn't just news, it's practically *first-hand* news. Because it rides in on the back of someone we trust, it skirts past our usual skepticism. Because urban legends make good telling (and who doesn't like being in the spotlight, looked up to as the one who knows all the really great stories?), it's almost guaranteed these tales will outlive us all. The legends we tell reflect current societal concerns and fears as well as confirm our worldview. As cautionary tales, urban legends warn us against engaging in risky behaviors by pointing out what has supposedly happened to others who did what we might be tempted try (Harris, 1998). Other legends confirm our belief that it's a big, bad world out there, one awash with crazed killers, drug addicts, unscrupulous companies out to make a buck at any cost, and a government that doesn't care. It is human tendency to jump to conclusion even when the evidence is ambiguous. No one knows how tales originate. The "truth" factor in fables and legends are not dependant on matching the incidents in stories to a real-life origin; contains the truth of some universal meaning or moral (Brunvand, 1999).

Many people believe an urban legend must be true because it is reported by a newspaper, or other "authoritative source." The persistence of Halloween stories (razors in apples, needles in candy) is an example of this. There are no documented cases of contamination of Halloween candy, but the media and police issue warnings year after year. Journalists, police officers and other authorities do get things wrong from time to time, and most of them openly admit this. There is no infallible source of information (Harris, 1998).

Folklore, Rumors, and Legends: Fulfilling Human Needs

People prefer entertainment to accuracy. Folklore, or folktales, is part of culture. Data about folklore can be used to test theories or hypotheses about culture as a whole. What does folklore do for the people who tell it? There is the obvious function of entertainment but also

serves a deeper meaning or serves as a psychological escape from many repressions. Isolation such as age, location or foreign language (lack of communication), possession of peculiar knowledge and one group admired by another play a role of folklore. Folktales have multiple existences, which means they are present in more than one time and one place. They contain simple themes such as wishes and fears but mold stories to have more effect on the listeners. There are four functions of stories: amusement, validation of culture, education, maintaining conformity to accepted patterns of behaviors (Dundes, 1965).

It is human desire to tell a story. Children love to hear stories. Adults love to read or watch reproduction of long stories and love to tell and listen to shorter stories. People need to talk, to tell about what has happened to them, and they need to hear about what has happened to others, especially when the others are people they care about or who have had experiences relevant to the hearer's own life (Schank, 1990). It takes at least two people to make a rumor. A rumor is a specific (or topical) proposition for belief, passed along from person to person, usually by word of mouth, without secure standards of evidence being present. The implication in any rumor is always that some truth is being communicated. Rumors are generally of only temporary interest, they come and go; sometimes the same ones recur. Rumors almost always deal with events or personalities. We cannot always tell whether we are listening to fact or to fantasy. We do not have time nor patience to check what we hear against outside standards of evidence. There are two basic conditions for rumor. First, the theme of the story must have some importance to speaker and listener; secondly, the true facts must be shrouded in some kind of ambiguity. Rumors do not circulate unless the topic has importance for the individual who hears and spreads the story; we are calling attention to the motivational factor in rumors. Any human need may provide motive power to gossip. Rumors often assuage immediate emotional tension

by providing a verbal outlet that gives relief; they often protect and justify the existence of these emotions which, if faced directly, might be unacceptable to their possessor; they sometimes provide a broader interpretation of various puzzling features of the environment, and so play a prominent part in the intellectual drive to render the surrounding world intelligible. Rumor is set in motion and continues to travel in a homogeneous social medium by virtue of the strong interests of the individuals involved in the transmission. The powerful influence of these interests requires the rumor to serve largely as a rationalizing agent explaining, justifying, and providing meaning for the emotional interest at work. At times, the relationship between the interest and the rumor is so intimate that we may describe the rumor simply as a projection of an altogether subjective emotional condition (Allport & Postman, 1947).

People are curious and want to know more. Legends seem often to be little more than primitive versions of science. It brings attention such as "I know something you don't know". It leads to self-importance or fill awkward gaps in conversations such as, "Did you hear about...?" As rumors travel, they tend to grow shorter, more concise, and more easily grasped. Everyone knows that rumors exaggerate. The point of any rumor is to convey unified impression of something deemed important. There are several kinds of rumors such as elaboration which depends on point of view, condensation which is the moral for everyday rumor is that the story we hear may in reality be a blend of several similar episodes and conventionalization which is a own private stereotype within a social group or also cultural assimilation. Rumor discourse exists in the tissue of every culture so to imagine society without is impossible. Legends are older than rumors. A legend may be regarded as a solidified rumor-it is transmitted from generation to generation. A legend is a rumor that has become part of the verbal heritage of a people (Allport & Postman, 1947).

Human beings are collections of stories. They accumulate stories over a lifetime, and when they are given the opportunity, they select an appropriate story and tell it. They determine appropriateness by a variety of measures, primarily familiarity, emotions, potential for shared viewpoint and seeking approval. The gist of the story can be altered to use a story for a variety of different purposes. Knowing a culture means knowing the stories that the culture provides and observing how people interpret their own experiences and construct own stories in the standard stories of the culture. The language of the culture also reflects the stories of the culture—one word or a simple phrase (Schank, 1990).

Are There Folktales in Deaf Culture?

Stories told by the members of a culture about their origins, whether they use religious or fantastic motifs are creations of meaning about the culture's existence. The study of Deaf culture is fairly new and every day, people are discovering folktales about d/Deaf people. Urban legends are not common in the Deaf community, partially because the majority of legends are told orally or the legends themselves do not translate well from hearing to deaf cultures. For example, one of the most famous cautionary urban legends is the "Hook-hand Killer" tale. In this story, a young couple on a date drive off to a remote spot to "park". Over the radio, they hear that a psychopath with a hooked hand has escaped from a local mental institution. The girl wants to leave, but her boyfriend insists there's nothing to worry about. After a while, the girl thinks she hears a scratching or tapping sound outside the car. The boyfriend assures her it's nothing, but at her insistence, they eventually drive off. When they get to the girl's house, the boyfriend goes around to the passenger side to open her door. To his horror, there is a bloody hook hanging from the door handle. This isn't common in the Deaf community because of the referrals that requires hearing things. For example, a Deaf couple cannot listen to the radio for

they can't hear a word. Second of all, if the girl was deaf, she couldn't have heard the scratching or tapping sound. This may be one of the reasons why some urban legends are not common in the Deaf community.

However, the Deaf community is not without stories. They feel that they were oppressed by the Hearing culture for many years, so many of their stories have to do with their upbringings in the hearing world (Gannon, 1981). . Because Deaf people as a group are not typically thought of as having been created in any one time or place, it took us a long time to recognize the following story for what it is: a folktale about the group's origins (Padden & Humphries, 1988). This particular folktale serves the same purpose-to tell where and how Deaf people began. In the spirit of storytelling, a few departures from fact would be forgivable. Here is an excerpt of a "deaf folktale":

The Abbe de l'Epee had been walking for a long time through a dark night. He wanted to stop and rest overnight, but he could not find a place to stay, until at a distance he saw a house with a light. He stopped at the house, knocked at the door, but no one answered. He saw that the door was open, so he entered the house and found two young women seated by the fire sewing. He spoke to them, but they did not respond. He walked closer and spoke to them again, but they failed again to respond. The Abbe was perplexed, but seated himself beside them. They looked up at him and did not speak. At that point, their mother entered the room. Did the Abbe not know that her daughters were deaf? He did not, but now he understood why they had not responded. As he contemplated the young women, the Abbe realized his vocation and invented sign language (Padden & Humphries, 1988, 23).

This story about de l'Epee is a folktale because he did not invent sign language. He supported the use of sign language in France as the language for the Deaf.

The American Deaf community also has its own folktales, which reveal the same urge to reconstruct and affirm the community through myth that we saw in the tale of de l'Epee. An example is the story of Joshua Davis, which originated as a family anecdote about the escapades

of a relative during the Civil War but by now has had fairly wide circulation in some parts of the country.

Eighteen-year-old Joshua Davis was squirrel hunting one day on his parents' southern plantation near Atlanta, GA during the civil War. Suddenly he found himself surrounded by Union soldiers. Davis was deaf but he could tell that they were shouting at him...Davis pointed to his ears and gestured that he was deaf but the soldiers did not believe him. They suspected that he was a spy and was trying to fool them by pretending to be deaf. They shoved and pushed the youth to a nearby house where a couple standing in front of it informed them that the youth was their son and that he was, indeed, deaf. The captors did not believe them either and they were looking for a rope to hang young Davis as a spy when a mounted officer rode up. The officer was informed that they had caught a spy who was "playing deaf". The officer rode over to the youth and fingerspelled to him: "Are you deaf?" The youth responded in signs, "Yes" "Where were you educated?" the officer asked next to which the young man told him at the school for the deaf in Cave Spring. With that information, they officer order the youth's release and the family's house spared (Gannon, 1981, 9).

Stories like these are much more than capsules of family history; they are active ways of affirming basic beliefs of the group. The stories are "instructions," which go beyond simply recalling the past and teach about how one's life should be conducted and what must be valued. First, as in other cultures, they are carriers of history, ways of repeating and reformulating the past for the present. And second, in the special circumstances of the Deaf community, these stories take on another burden: they are vital means of teaching the wisdom of the group to those who do not have Deaf families (Padden & Humphries, 1988).

Why Are There So Many Urban Legends Out There?

The urban legend now has much less vitality as an oral narrative genre than in the past. Instead, urban legends had started to vanish from the realm of oral tradition and had mostly migrated from folklore into popular culture where they became stereotyped, standardized,

exploited, commodified, and repackaged in a number of ways (Wells, 1999). Now, the most common medium for the circulation of urban legends is the Internet, and thus their performance tends to be shaped more by this remote electronic medium than by the face-to-face processes of word of mouth transmission. Urban legends can travel by word of mouth or print, but the Internet has become the prime vehicle for their dissemination (Brunvand, 2001). There are a broad range of sources including oral traditions, written versions, newspapers, advice columns, tabloids, literature, folklore studies, radio/television, and the Internet. Internet distribution of urban legends had become so pervasive by late 1998 that an "Anti-Urban Legend" letter started to circulate there (Brunvand, 1999). Modern technology has only served to speed up this process. One school of thought suggested that the Internet with its power to inform the masses would help to weed out bogus tales and debunk long-standing myths. What has happened is quite the opposite. The technology that enables a college student in New Zealand to communicate with a high school sophomore in Nebraska, who then passes on the story to a cyberspace pen pal in Tokyo, has put the modern urban legend on fast-forward, zipping around the planet at a breakneck pace. Additionally, the Internet has proved to be a fertile landscape for the endless circulation of phony press releases, doctored documents, concocted quotations and news stories falsely attributed to legitimate organizations and /or nonexistent newspapers and wire services (Roeper, 1999). Where it used to take weeks, months, even years for an urban legend to travel around the world (via party conversation, water cooler gossip, and chain letters), it can be a matter of hours before everyone from New York to Honolulu to London to Beijing is familiar with the shocking story of the young man who picked up the attractive woman in a bar and took her back to his hotel room for unprotected sex, only to wake up the next morning to see a chilling message on his bathroom mirror: WELCOME TO THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF

AIDS (Roeper, 1999). As we enter the millennium, we're supposedly smarter, better informed and less willing to believe everything we read. But if that's the case, why do millions of people pass on e-mail chain letters and repeat celebrity urban legends without stopping for one moment to consider if there's any truth to what they've heard? Today's information consumer is savvy, jaded, and cynical, yet as willing as ever to believe stories that happened to "my best friend's brother's accountant" (Roeper, 1999).

METHOD

Awareness of False Information and Questions:

My intention for this study was to find if there is a significant difference between hearing and D/deaf college students in their awareness of false information. I assumed there would be a noticeable difference between these two groups of people. I thought perhaps one of the possible causes was that D/deaf students were not exposed to oral traditions which urban legends are a part of compared to their hearing peers. In order to get the kind of data I had hoped to receive, I formulated questions such as age, sex, whether hearing or deaf, parents and siblings' hearing status, kinds of school attended to, and various ways the participants could be exposed to such legends (see Appendix A). It is important to know if deaf students were exposed to false information and being able to tell the difference between the truth and fiction. Because if the data shows that deaf people did poorly on detecting truth and fiction, then teachers of the deaf need to find ways to expose their deaf students to such media.

Subjects and Participants:

I asked twenty participants to take my survey on a website. These participants were chosen randomly by stratification (hearing status, race, gender, and age) in the labs at National

Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) and Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). The participants were asked to volunteer to be a part of my research study.

Procedures:

I showed my participants a website with my survey questions in the lab (see Appendix A). The questions included demographic information about the participant such as age, sex, education, parents, siblings, preferred mode of communication and some questions like if they have attended a deaf camp, parties or if they have e-mail access or read newspapers, comics, books and watch television and what kind of shows they like to watch. There were boxes for where they could add more comments if necessary to support the questions. There were some short answers to questions such as what awareness meant to them and how did they know what they saw or heard was the truth. The next part of the survey included pictures, stories and e-mails, both real and fictional. The participants looked at the question and decided if it is real or not. After completing the survey, I gave them the opportunity to talk with me about these stories they read or heard about. I also asked them which story and picture they remembered the most and why (see Appendix A). The data was collected, analyzed, and comparisons were made to the survey to reveal the awareness of false information and urban legends.

RESULTS

Twenty students participated in my survey. Ten participants were deaf or hard of hearing. 20% were between 17 and 20 years old, 70% between 21 and 25 and only 10% was over 26 years old as shown in Table1 and Figure 1.

Age	Deaf		Hearing	
	N	%	N	%
17-20	2	20	5	50
21-25	7	70	2	20
26-30	1	10	2	20
31+			1	10

Table 1: Age of participants

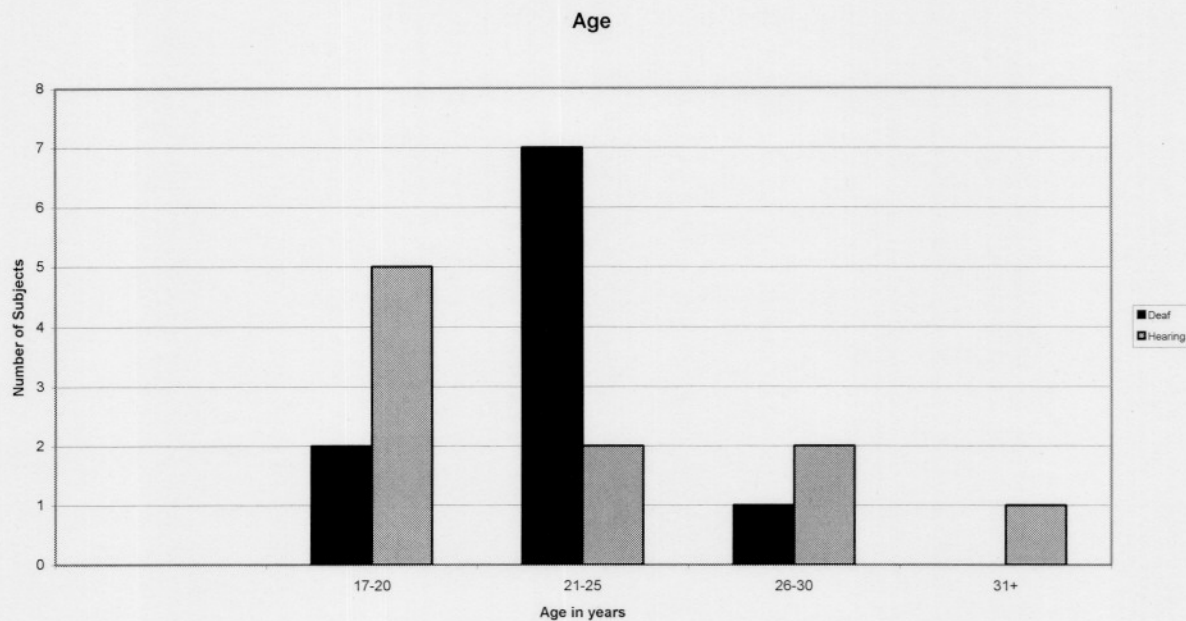


Figure 1: A graph showing the ages of participants

The average time of these participants for taking the survey was about fourteen minutes. The other ten participants were hearing. 50% were between 17 and 20 years old, 20% were between 21 and 25 years old, 20% were between 26 and 30 and only 10% were over 31 years old as shown in Table/Figure 1. The average time of these participants for taking the survey was about nine minutes. All twenty students were chosen at random, either at NTID Learning Center (NLC) or in the library at RIT.

Out of these D/HOH participants, six were males, and four were females. 60% of the students considered themselves Deaf and only 40% considered themselves hard of hearing. Only one Deaf student had Deaf parents and Deaf siblings. 60% of these participants attended

residential school and 40% were mainstreamed. 80% planned to obtain an associate's degree when the other 20% planned to obtain a bachelor's degree. 70% preferred to use voice and sign as their mode of communication, and 30% preferred sign only. All had access to the Internet and had e-mail accounts. When asked which media they read the most, 20% preferred to read the newspaper, 30% magazines, 10% comics, 30% books and 10% others as shown in Table 2 and Figure 2.

Media	Deaf		Hearing	
		%		%
News	2	20	2	20
Magazines	3	30	3	30
Comics	1	10		
Books	3	30	5	50
Others	1	10		

Table 2: Reading material preferences

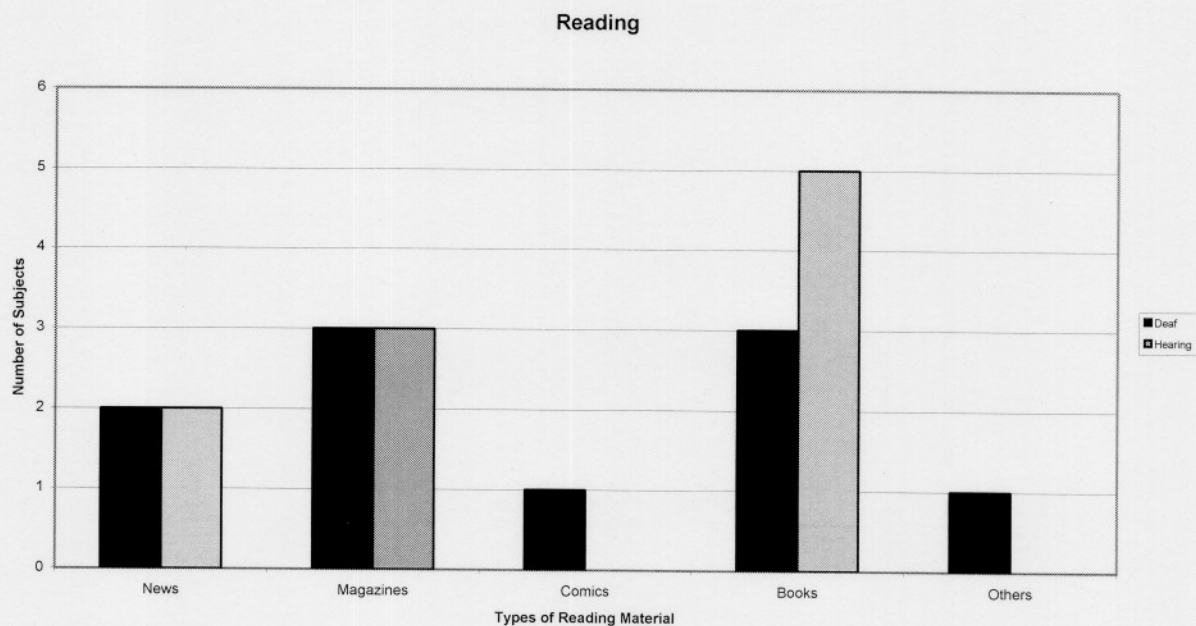


Figure 2: A graph showing reading material preferences between Deaf and Hearing participants.

When asked what program they preferred to watch on television, 50% said the news, 20% documentaries, 20% sitcoms, and 10% replied that they didn't watch television as shown in

Table 3 and Figure 3. Only 30% shared stories in activities. When sharing these stories, they replied that they talked about how hard it was to communicate with the hearing culture, and also about deaf events.

	Deaf		Hearing	
		%		%
News	5	50	2	20
Talk Shows			2	20
Documentaries	2	20		
Sitcoms	2	20	3	30
Do not watch	1	10	3	30

Table 3: Television preferences

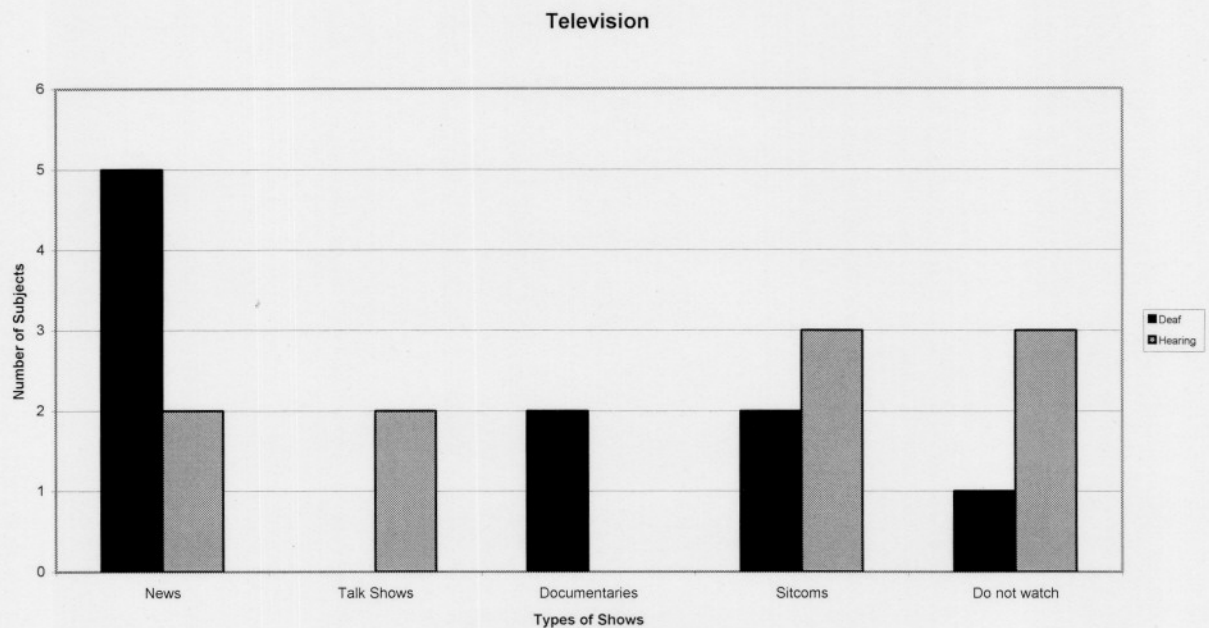


Figure 3: A graph showing television preferences between Deaf and Hearing participants

Out of the hearing participants, four were male and six were female. None of them had any deaf members in their family. 80% attended public school and 20% attended private schools. 70% planned to obtain a bachelor's degree and 30% planned to obtain a master's degree. 90% preferred voice only as their mode of communication. All had access to the Internet and had e-mail accounts. When asked which media they read the most, 20% read the newspaper,

30% magazines, and 50% books as shown in Table/Figure 2. When asked what program they preferred to watch on television, 20% said the news, 20% said talk shows, 30% sitcoms, and 30% said they did not watch television as shown in Table3 and Figure 3. 60% of them shared stories in activities. When sharing these stories, they replied that they gossiped, talked about school events, compared sports, shared humorous stories and one participant actually mentioned urban legends.

When all of the 20 participants were asked what awareness meant, most replied that it meant knowing the difference between the truth and lies. Most of the participants replied to the question about how they knew a person was telling the truth. Some said it was based on the person's body language and eye contact. One said that s/he needs to see the proof in order to believe it. One person said that his or her friends always tell the truth. The survey asked how they knew what they were drinking and eating was what was given, not something else such as urine or meat from a rat, the majority said that they assumed the person who gave them the drink or food is an honest person. They also said they assumed it would never happen to them. Some said that they didn't know and a few said, if it didn't hurt them, then it does taste good.

The survey included seven pictures, fifteen stories, and four e-mails (see Appendix A). The results of this study revealed that there was no significant difference between deaf students and hearing students' awareness of false information. The mean of total errors for D/HOH participants was 9.6, whereas for the hearing participants, 9.3 errors as shown in Table 4.

Errors	Deaf		Hearing	
	N	%	N	%
4			1	10
5			1	10
6				
7	3	30		
8	1	10		
9	1	10	3	30

10	1	10	2	20
11	1	10	1	10
12	2	20	1	10
13	1	10		
14			1	10
Mean	9.6		9.3	

Table 4: Total errors

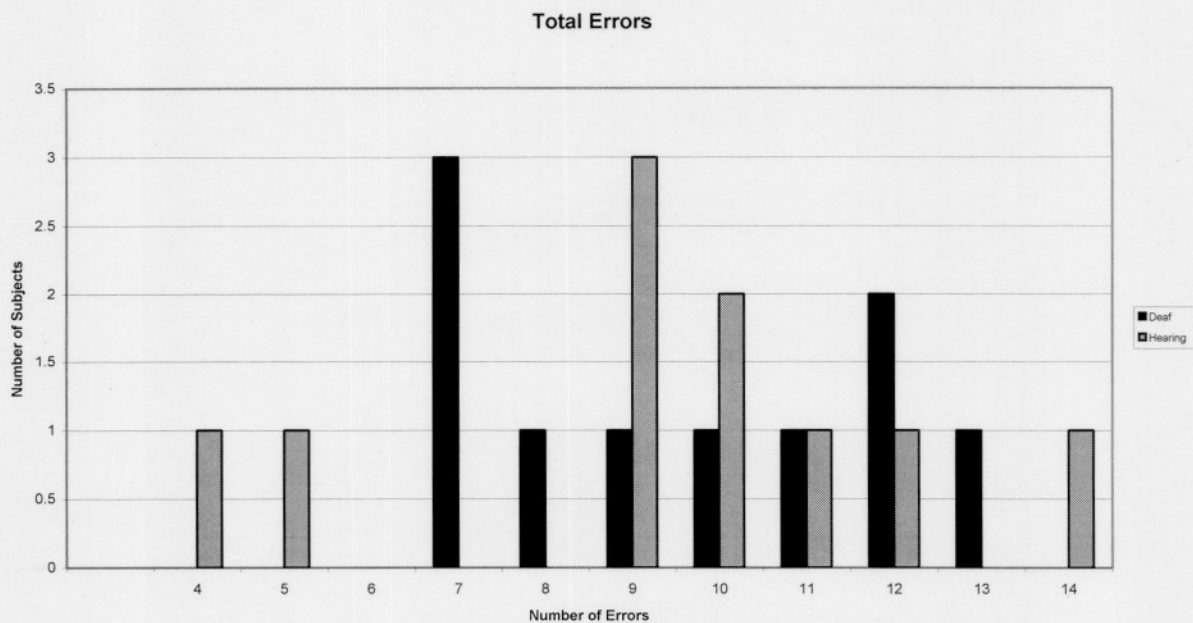


Figure 4: A graph showing total errors between Deaf and Hearing participants.

For errors in the pictures only, the mean for D/HOH participants was 2.4 and for hearing participants, 1.9 errors as shown in Table 5.

Errors	Deaf		Hearing		
	N	%	N	%	
0			2	20	
1	2	20	2	20	
2	4	40	2	20	
3	3	30	3	30	
4			1	10	
5	1	10			
Mean	2.4		1.9		

Table 5: Picture errors

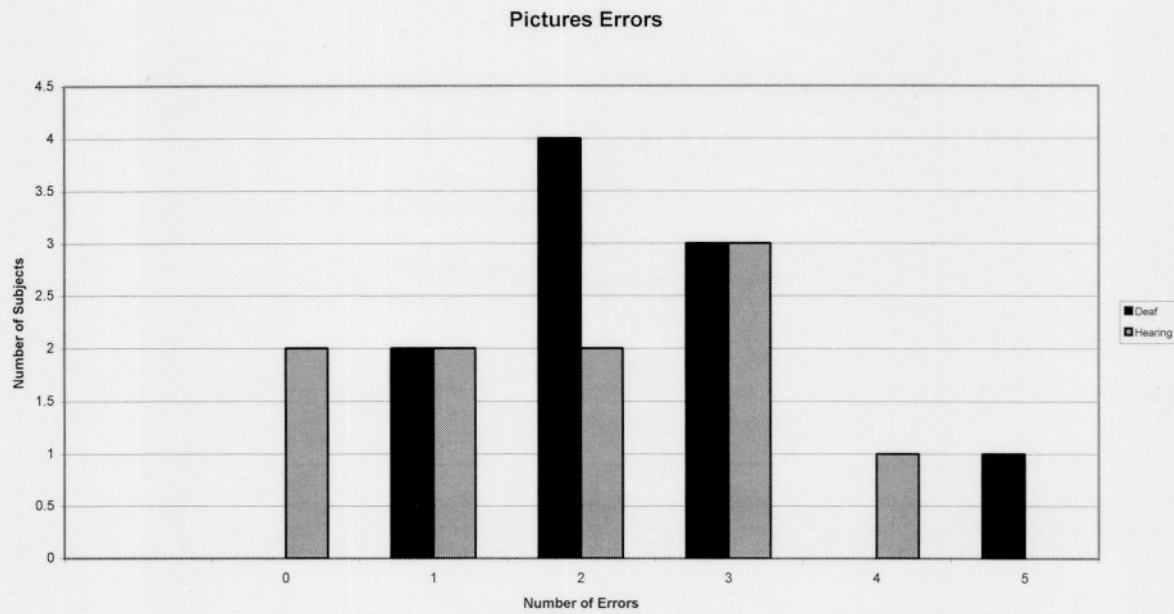


Figure 5: A graph showing picture errors between Deaf and Hearing participants.

In the stories section, D/HOH participants' mean was 7.2 errors and for the hearing participants, the mean was 7.4 errors as shown in Table 6.

Errors	Deaf		Hearing		
	N	%	N	%	
4			1	10	
5	2	20	1	10	
6	3	30	2	20	
7			2	20	
8	2	20	1	10	
9	2	20			
10	1	10	2	20	
11			1	10	
Mean	7.2		7.4		

Table 6: Stories errors

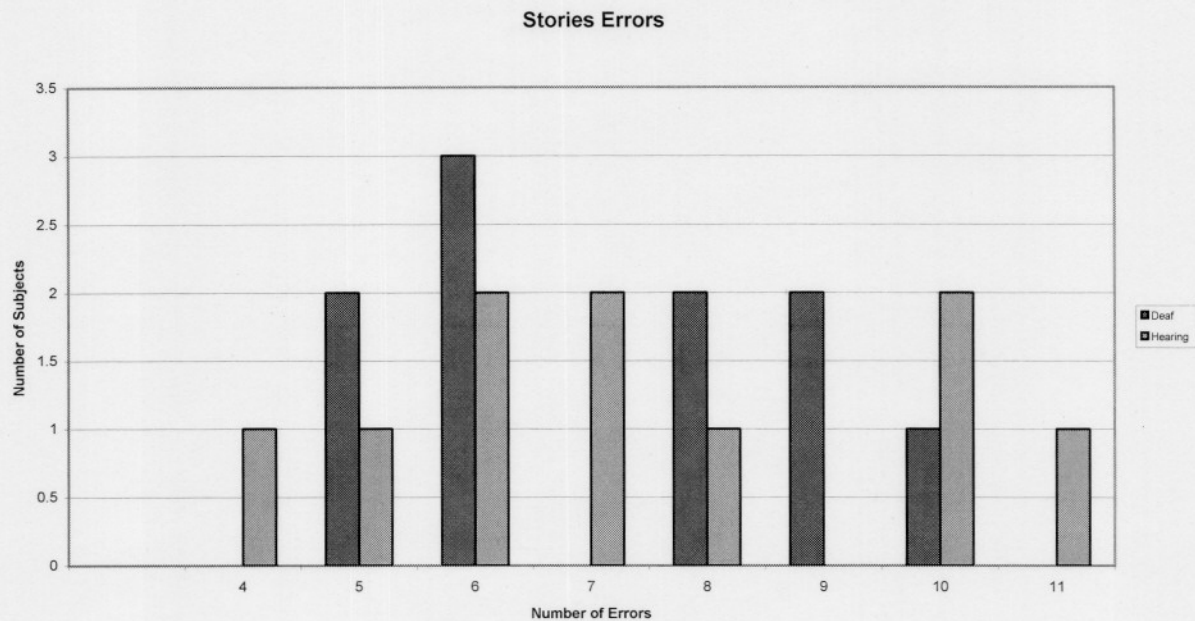


Figure 6: A graph showing stories errors between Deaf and Hearing participants.

Out of the D/HOH participants, only 50% had seen the Microsoft scam e-mail, 40% had seen the “David” e-mail, 50% had seen the twins e-mail and 10% had seen the cookie e-mail. For the hearing participants, 50% had seen the Microsoft scam e-mail, 30% had seen “David” e-mail, 20% had seen the twins e-mail and none had seen the cookie e-mail.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from this study that more research needs to be done in learning about awareness of false information. This survey allowed me to explore my assumptions about Deaf and Hard of hearing students’ gap with hearing students. I had assumed because the majority of folklore and legends were told orally that D/HOH wouldn’t be able to receive such stories. It is common knowledge that research has shown that average reading level of a deaf student is ranked at a fourth grade level. It isn’t surprising that one would assume there is a large gap between D/HOH students and their hearing peers. However, that kind of research is relevant for reading skills. My survey tested basically on their knowledge of urban legends and awareness of false

information. It is obvious that despite the kind of education they received, both are equally the same when it comes to false information. According to my results, deaf students made about the same number of errors in the stories as the hearing subjects did. I had anticipated that deaf students would make more mistakes on the reading part, due to the research out there. In this case, it isn't so.

Perhaps with the increase use of technology and the use of the Internet, it had brought the gap closer for D/HOH students. According to my results, I noticed that D/deaf students preferred to watch the news and documentaries (factual information) while hearing students preferred talk shows and sitcoms (opinions and stories). Now that the Deaf community has access to information via the Internet, they aren't out of the loop anymore as they were fifty years ago. It is likely that everyone makes assumptions, no matter what their reason is. It is probable to assume that a D/deaf person will be left out in the hearing world, but it is also possible for a D/deaf person to assume hearing people know everything whereas a hearing person could be left out in the deaf world or even their own hearing world.

Because everyone makes assumptions, it is possible the teachers do the same thing. They may assume that all D/deaf students are weak in areas of reading and writing. With the results of the survey based on awareness of false information, teachers can see that D/deaf students are aware of what is going on around them. Teachers can take advantage of the students' knowledge and apply it into their own curriculum. For example, an English teacher can take a few urban legends and have students study and read them. For assignments, students can write their own urban legends. For social studies, the students can take their own urban legends and ask their peers if they believe such things and for math, they can use their results into statistical information. For science, teachers can conduct experiments such as the "kidney" organ donors

and prove to students how it is not possible to be a donor in such conditions. To encourage students to have more world knowledge in order to identify false information, teachers can use technology and have students read news and view websites that discuss odd things. Students can have discussions about how they can detect which story is true or false. Many of these urban legends can be found in movies and television shows. If teachers expose their students to such legends, students will be able to detect hints of folklore when viewing a show or a movie.

Also, based on the survey results, both hearing and D/deaf participants were fascinated with pictures and were interested in the stories provided. This is a good starting point that these things will prompt students to read. Motivation is the key to students learning new things everyday. Nowadays, children are mesmerized with computer games, video games, movies, television or chatting on line so teachers need to come up with new things everyday to keep their students inspired to read and write.

There may truly be no difference between the two groups despite studies done in the past. However, I am aware that my survey may be faulty due to the type of questions that were asked. I only had twenty participants for my study. If I had a hundred students, would the results be the same? What if the survey was conducted nationwide? Would there be a difference between hearing peers and D/deaf peers when it comes to urban legends? For further research, one can conduct a study on older people who did not have access to the Internet. Would they have the same awareness as the younger generation? Another possible study is to conduct a survey with high school students where they have the most exposure of false information, such as urban legends via the Internet and also through their peers in school.

CONCLUSION

It will always be human nature to tell bizarre stories, and there will always be an audience waiting to believe them. The urban legend is a part of our make-up. It is natural for everyone to make assumptions about things that are going on around him or her. Especially that today's teachers should be aware that there is no significant difference between hearing and D/deaf students when it comes to using their world knowledge to identify false information. It is up to teachers to take advantage of their students' interest in bizarre stories or to educate students about awareness of false information and at the same time, enjoy a good laugh.

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Appendix A

JUST A SURVEY

This survey will be used in a study for my master's thesis project. You will be asked to include some of your background information and to read some stories, look at pictures, and check out some e-mails. The results of this survey will not be shared with the general public. Thank you so much for your time. Enjoy!

1. YOUR AGE

17-20
21-25
26-30
31+

2. YOUR SEX

Male
Female

3. TYPE OF SCHOOLS YOU HAVE ATTENDED (click all that applies)

Residential/Private
Mainstream
Public

4. DEGREE LEVEL CURRENTLY PURSUING

AAS/AOS
BA/BS
MA/MS
Other

4a. IF IN COLLEGE, WHAT IS YOUR MAJOR?

5. ARE YOU

Deaf
Hearing
Hard of hearing

6. DO YOU HAVE DEAF/HOH PARENTS IN YOUR FAMILY?

Yes
No Unknown

7. DO YOU HAVE DEAF/HOH SIBLINGS IN YOUR FAMILY?

Yes
No
I have no siblings

8. WHAT IS YOUR PREFERRED MODE OF COMMUNICATION?

Voice Only
Voice and Sign
Sign Only
Other

9. HAVE YOU ATTENDED ANY OF THESE ACTIVITIES? [click all that applies]

Camp
Deaf events
Slumber Parties
Clubs
Other
None

9a. IF YOU SELECTED 'NONE', PLEASE GO TO QUESTION 10. OTHERWISE, PROCEED TO THE NEXT QUESTION.

9b. DID YOU TELL OR HEAR STORIES AT ANY OF THE ACTIVITIES SELECTED ABOVE?

Example: scary stories, true stories, gossip, etc...

9c. IF SO, PLEASE WRITE DOWN A SUMMARY OF THE STORY.

10. DO YOU HAVE AN E-MAIL ACCOUNT?

11. WHICH OF THESE DO YOU READ THE MOST (FOR ENTERTAINMENT)?

Newspapers
Magazines
Comics
Books
Other
I do not read

12. WHICH ONE DO YOU WATCH THE MOST ON TV?

News
Talk shows

Documentaries
Sitcoms (which ones?)
I do not watch TV

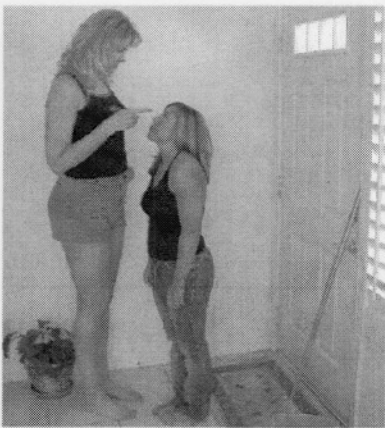
PLEASE ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

1. What does awareness of truth of information mean to you?
2. How do you know someone is telling you the truth, not a made up story?
3. How do you know you are not eating rat meat from a restaurant?
4. When you drink apple juice, how do you know you are not drinking pee?

PLEASE IDENTIFY THE PICTURES SHOWN AS EITHER TRUE OR FALSE



3.



4.



5.





6.



7.

PLEASE IDENTIFY THE STORIES AS EITHER TRUE OR FALSE

1. A New Orleans woman was diagnosed HIV-positive after pricking her leg on a syringe tip intentionally broken off in the cushion of a movie theatre seat.
2. A Virginia golfer who played 36 holes while carrying his tee in his mouth was poisoned by a pesticide used on the greens and died 10 days later.
3. Reading in dim light will ruin your eyes.
4. While shooting Disney's White Wilderness, a film crew induced a herd of lemmings into jumping off a cliff.
5. An Arizona woman who brought a cactus home from the desert got more than she bargained for; within days the plant burst open, spewing deadly tarantulas all over her living room.
6. A 200-lb block of frozen urine mistakenly jettisoned from a passenger jet's lavatory holding tank over Boston crashed through the roof of a suburban townhouse, killing the family's dog.

7. Microsoft once offered \$1,000 to Internet users for forwarding a promotional e-mail to friends and family.
8. Turkey was on the menu of the Pilgrims' first Thanksgiving.
9. A woman who cut her tongue while licking envelopes had to undergo surgery to remove roach eggs, which were apparently imbedded in the envelope's glue.
10. Benjamin Franklin was the first to suggest daylight savings time.
11. New York City has had alligators living in its sewer system for so long, scientists believe the creatures have evolved into a distinct species of albino lizards.
12. English beer contains fish guts.
13. A bride-to-be, intent on getting some color for her wedding day, cooked her internal organs to a crisp by spending several hours lying in a tanning bed.
14. An Arizona man was arrested for public nudity when police spotted him chasing an RV down a desert highway. He had stepped out of the vehicle at a rest stop to relieve himself just as his wife pulled away.
15. The State of Michigan once threatened to fine a local beaver colony \$10,000 for failing to remove their dam.

HAVE YOU RECEIVED ANY OF THESE E-MAILS IN YOUR ACCOUNT?

1. Subject: Fw: PLEEEEEEESE READ!!!! It was on the news!!!! To all of my friends, I do not usually forward messages, but this is from my good friend Pearlas Sanborn and she really is an attorney. If she says that this will work - it WILL work. After all, what have you got to lose?

SORRY EVERYBODY.....JUST HAD TO TAKE THE CHANCE!!!

I'm an attorney, and I know the law. This thing is for real. Rest assured AOL and Intel will follow through with their promises for fear of facing a multimillion-dollar class action suit similar to the one filed by PepsiCo against General Electric not too long ago.

Dear Friends,

Please do not take this for a junk letter. Bill Gates is sharing his fortune. If you ignore this you will repent later. Microsoft and AOL are now the largest Internet companies and in an effort to make sure that Internet Explorer remains the most widely used program, Microsoft and AOL are running an e-mail beta test.

When you forward this e-mail to friends, Microsoft can and will track it (if you are a Microsoft Windows user) for a two week time period. For every person that you forward this e-mail to, Microsoft will pay you \$245.00, for every person that you sent it to that forwards it on, Microsoft will pay you \$243.00 and for every third person that receives it, you will be paid

\$241.00. Within two weeks, Microsoft will contact you for your address and then send you a cheque.

Regards.
Charles S. Bailey
General Manager Field Operations
1/800-842-2332 Ext. 1085 or
904/245-1085 or RNX 292-1085
Charles_Bailey@csx.com

I thought this was a scam myself, but two weeks after receiving this e-mail and forwarding it on, Microsoft contacted me for my address and within days, I received a cheque for US \$24,800.00. You need to respond before the beta testing is over. If anyone can afford this Bill Gates is the man. It's all marketing expense to him. Please forward this to as many people as possible. You are bound to get at least US\$10,000.00. We're not going to help them out with their e-mail beta test without getting a little something for our time. My brother's girlfriend got in on this a few months ago. When I went to visit him for the Baylor/UT game. She showed me her check. It was for the sum of \$4,324.44 and was stamped "Paid In Full". Like I said before, I know the law, and this is for real.

Intel and AOL are now discussing a merger which would make them the largest Internet company and in an effort make sure that AOL remains the most widely used program, Intel and AOL are running an e-mail beta test. When you forward this e-mail to friends, Intel can and will track it (if you are a Microsoft Windows user) for a two week time period.

For every person that you forward this e-mail to, Microsoft will pay you \$203.15. For every person that you sent it to that forwards it on, Microsoft will pay you \$156.29. And for every third person that receives it, you will be paid \$17.65. Within two weeks, Intel will contact you for your address and then send you a check. I thought this was a scam myself, but a friend of my good friend's Aunt Patricia, who works at Intel, actually got a check of \$4,543.23 by forwarding this e-mail. Try it, what have you got to lose????

2. Hello. My name is David Lawitts and I have severe lung and throat cancer due to second hand smoke. This chain was a final attempt to help solve my problem. For every one person that this letter is sent to, the national lung and cancer association will donate 3 cents to help me and other people like me become healthy again. If you do not pass this letter on, my life and memory will soon both be gone. So please, try to send this to at least 10 people. It is for a good cause. (By the way, be sure one of the people you send it to is "CWOVES@GEOCITIES.COM" as he keeps track of the names that have passed this along.) I give my blessing to those who pass this along. To those too selfish to take 2 minutes to do this, what goes around comes around. Thank you.

3. Olsen Twins Set to Attend Rochester Institute of Technology

It has been confirmed that Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, two of the richest teens in America, have decided to attend Rochester Institute of Technology beginning in the fall of the 2003-2004 academic year. The twins have been tutored and have completed their high school education a

year early. The twins picked RIT for its strong academic reputation, and excellent business school. When asked why the twins were choosing a school in upstate New York, their publicist said that they were looking for a school where they would not be distracted by the glitz of Hollywood, and could focus on long-term career goals.

4. THIS IS A TRUE STORY

My daughter and I had just finished a salad at a Neiman-Marcus Cafe in Dallas, and we decided to have a small dessert. Because both of us are such cookie lovers, we decided to try the "Neiman-Marcus cookie. It was so excellent that I asked if they would give me the recipe, and the waitress said with a small frown, "I'm afraid not, but you can buy the recipe," Well, I asked how much, and she responded, "Only two fifty-it's a great deal!" I agreed to that, and told her to just add it to my tab.

Thirty days later, I received my VISA statement, and the Neiman-Marcus charge was \$285.00! I looked again, and I remembered I had only spent \$9.95 for two salads and about \$20.00 for a scarf. As I glanced at the bottom of the statement, it said, "Cookie Recipe-\$250.00." That was outrageous!

I called Neiman's Accounting Department and told them the waitress said it was "two fifty," which clearly does not mean "two hundred and fifty dollars" by any reasonable interpretation of the phrase.

Neiman-Marcus refused to budge. They would not refund my money because, according to them, "What the waitress told you is not our problem. You have already seen the recipe. We absolutely will not refund your money at this point." I explained to the Accounting Department lady the criminal statutes, which govern fraud in the state of Texas.

I threatened to report them to the Better Business Bureau and the Texas Attorney General's office for engaging in fraud. I was basically told, Do what you want. Don't bother thinking of how you can get even, and don't bother trying to get any of your money back." I just said, Okay, you folks got my \$250, and now I'm going to have \$250 worth of fun,"

I told her that I was going to see to it that every cookie lover in the United States with a e-mail account has a \$250 cookie recipe from Neiman-Marcus...for free. She replied, "I wish you wouldn't do this." I said, "Well, perhaps you should have thought of that before you ripped me off!" and slammed down the phone.

So here it is! Please, please, please pass it on to everyone you can possibly think of. I paid \$250 for this, and I don't want Neiman-Marcus to EVER make another penny off of this recipe!

NEIMAN-MARCUS COOKIES (Recipe may be halved)

2 cups butter
24oz. chocolate chips
4 cups flour

- 2 cups of granulated sugar
- 2 cups brown sugar
- 2 tsp. soda
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 8 oz. Hershey Bar (grated)
- 5 cups blended oatmeal
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 4 eggs
- 2 tsp. vanilla
- 3 cups chopped nuts (your choice)

Measure oatmeal, and blend in a blender to a fine powder. Cream the butter and both sugars. Add eggs and vanilla, mix together with flour, oatmeal, salt, baking powder, and soda. Add chocolate chips, Hershey Bar, and nuts. Roll into balls, and place two inches apart on a cookie sheet.

Bake for 10 minutes at 375 degrees. Makes 112 cookies.

PLEASE READ THE RECIPE AND SEND IT TO EVERY PERSON YOU KNOW WHO HAS AN E-MAIL ADDRESS! THIS IS REALLY TERRIFIC!! Have fun!!! This is not a joke-it's a true story.

What was your response to these e-mails? Did you believe any of them? If so, which ones?

MISCELLANEOUS

1. Which picture do you remember the most (from the survey)?
2. Which story do you remember the most (from the survey)?
3. If you would like the answers, please provide your e-mail address.

Your e-mail